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MSHA issues warning to coal mine operators about winter hazards

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Department of Labor’s Mine Safety and Health Administration this week launched its annual “Winter Alert” campaign, which warns coal mine operators and miners of the numerous hazards colder winter weather may cause for working miners. Statistics show that deadly mine explosions historically occur more often during October through March than during warmer periods.

“During winter, everyone in our industry needs to be more alert to changes brought on by cold and icy weather conditions,” said Joseph A. Main, assistant secretary of labor for mine safety and health. “Operators of underground coal mines need to be fully aware of the precautions they can take to avoid tragic accidents at their mine sites, and these include thorough examinations, sufficient ventilation, adequate rock dusting and maintaining escape routes.”

MSHA emphasizes these four critical remedies for keeping mining operations safe during winter months. Colder air brings low barometric pressures and low humidity to the mine environment. Coupled with seasonal drying of surfaces on the mine roofs, ribs and bottom, this fosters conditions conducive to propagating an explosion. Colder weather also creates an environment for other potential hazards, such as icy walkways and haulage roads, limited visibility, and freezing and thawing of highwalls, which causes instability.

This winter, during regular inspections, MSHA inspectors will educate mine operators about the importance of thorough mine examinations, sufficient ventilation, and the importance of generous rock dusting to neutralize and stop potential coal dust explosions.

“We can significantly reduce the probability of tragic mining accidents during winter months when all mine operators heed these simple—but important—precautions,” said Main.

For detailed information about Winter Alert, visit the agency’s website at <http://www.msha.gov/winteralert2013/winteralert2013.asp>.

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